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as provinces. The choice fell upon a uterine brother of Naba Kom, Moustapha Kongo.

He was recalled in 1930 after ruling for only three years. His dismissal was certainly due to errors committed in the performance of his duties, but it was also caused by the fact that the Boussancé had been independent too long to take kindly to a master.

Thus, as was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the local administration has interfered too much with the organization of the Mossi empire. The position of the Mogho Naba has been completely distorted, and his prestige diminished. This is why the ill-informed official to whom we have already alluded could state that the authority of the Mogho Naba over his vassal chiefs was merely nominal.

A list of Boussancé cantons under the authority of the Mogho Naba follows: (1) Niaogo, (2) Niarba, (3) Lenga, (4) Gon Boussougou, (5) Komtoéga, (6) Beguedo, (7) Ouanragou, (8) Sanogo, (9) Toalla, (10) Zourga, (11) Yakala.

643 has been accepted up to now, is a true king in his territory and as such is absolutely independent of the Mogho Naba at Ouagadougou, to the same degree as the head of the state of Yatenga (Ouahigouya) and the head of Fada N'Gourma.

As was pointed out in an earlier chapter [not translated], the Tenkodogo Naba is the descendant of Naba Zoungrana, the son of Ouedraogo, and is consequently the "elder" of the Mogho Naba, who is a descendant of Naba Oubri, the founder of the Mossi dynasty of Ouagadougou.

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635 The Boulsa Naba, a direct descendant of the kourita [representative after death] of [55] Naba Oubri, is not a dima but merely a kombéré. He has a vassal, to be sure, the chief of Koupéla in the circle of Tenkodogo who is now considered a province chief, but the Boulsa Naba himself is a vassal of the Mogho Naba.

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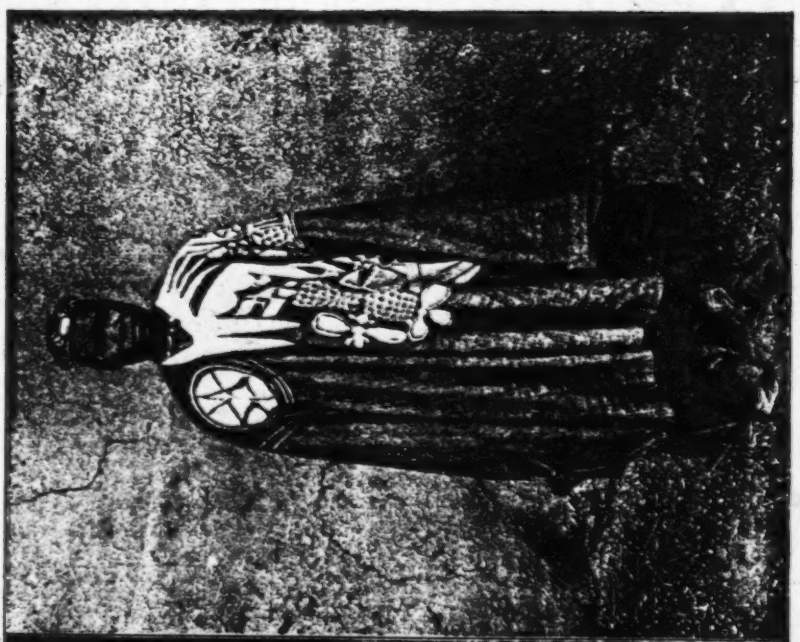

The Moro Naba of the Mossi.

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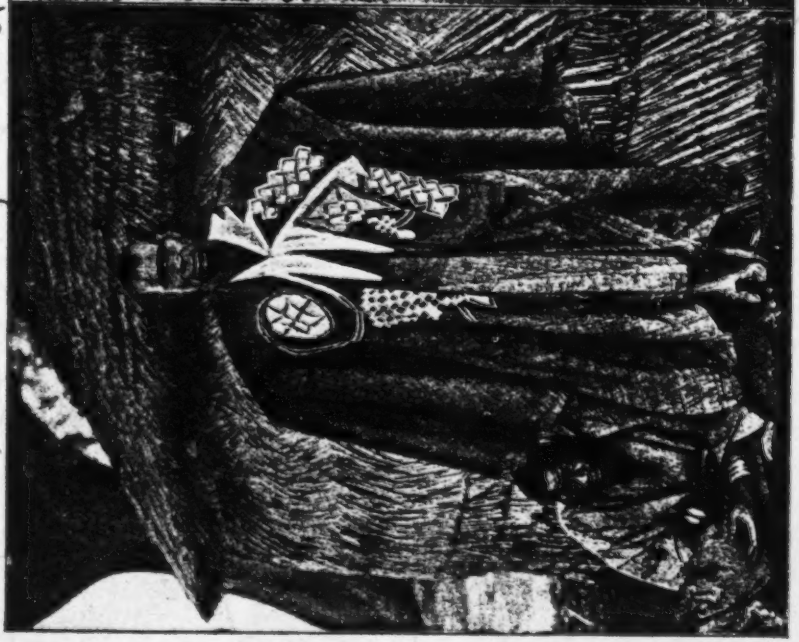

A Mossi Province Chief.

622 1. Ti'douda béleum villi n'pam n'dou. Those who wish to
539 climb a tree seize the branches for support. /21/

2. Gigemdé sen touka séolro, wenniginamma, walpélronamma, nonga morbo, la'b zuéta gemdé. The lion digs up the salty earth (good to eat); the buffalo and koba /a kind of horse antelope/ like to eat it, but fear the lion. (The enemies of the Saman'Naba would like to take his place, but fear the naba.)

3. Kong'panga, bar'bala. Those who lack strength remain servants.

645 The appointment of the high ministers involves only a few gifts,
635 offered during the festive days which last from the death of the minister to the nomination of his successor. The eldest son usually inherits the position, but the province chief may designate anyone he pleases.

636 Upon the death of the naba of Koupéla, a province chief, the ministers hold a council and decide among themselves who is to be his successor. The eldest son is nearly always chosen. Before the name of the man selected is announced, the head of the village section that bears the name Koupéla notifies the canton chiefs, who gather in the village of Koupéla. When everyone has arrived, the Tabrana /sic/ proclaims the name of the man chosen, and they all proceed to Bélousa to disclose their choice to the naba and to request his investiture. The naba of Bélousa usually accepts the man thus formally designated. If there is disagreement, or if he himself would prefer a different choice, he notifies the Moro Naba accordingly and indicates his own preferences; when his messenger returns, he proclaims the appointment, and everyone submits to his will. After all, he "has the strength." As badges of investiture, the naba of Bélousa presents the chosen man with a cap, a pair of shoes, and a scepter. The new naba still may not wear the cap, put on the shoes, or hold
769 the scepter. He must proceed first to the grave of the ancestor of the people, Naba Kourita, where he offers sacrifices, especially that of a cow. The festivities last for seven days, in the course of which millet beer flows freely and cattle is slaughtered in large numbers. In the course of these festivities the head of the chosen man is shaved, and he receives from the messengers of the naba of Bélousa the cap, shoes, and scepter; only then does he truly become a naba, with the right to

635 wear spurs and to have pages and a pillow. When the festivities are over at Kourit'Yaorin, the naba enters Koupéla where he is to reside.

643 When the Moro Naba died, the country fell prey to revolution and
669 to the servants of the deceased, who looted everything they could. This is why the death of the Moro Naba was carefully concealed until the day of the funeral; this is why, once it had been announced, no one dared go out without a bow and arrows or at least a spear. Women and children stayed home. In order to prevent any disorder, a new
643 election was called as soon as possible. The Widi Naba acted as intermediary and gathered the votes of the electors. The latter numbered twenty-five: the five high ministers and twenty other chiefs, of no great importance in everyday life, who were not canton chiefs and were often mere family heads, but who were high electors by right inherited from father to son since the founding of the Ouagadougou dynasty. These twenty-five electors consulted the people of their entourage and told the Widi Naba which candidate had received their vote. There could be several candidates, but to be elected one had to be a member of the family /22/of Naba Oubri, the founder of the dynasty. Once the funeral ceremonies were over, the Widi Naba rounded up all the canton chiefs and all the nabas present in Ouagadougou, and proclaimed the name of the man chosen, to whom he presented the badges of office. Numerous ceremonies followed, the most solemn of which took place in a small village called Paspanga, two kilometers from Ouagadougou. All the nabas went there in turn, beginning with the defeated candidates, to render their oath of loyalty.

All these customs were followed for the investiture of the present Moro Naba, Naba Kom.

Chapter 3. Rights of Chiefs and Rights of Private Individuals

631 The nabas, whether heads of villages, cantons, or provinces, were all-powerful, and no one could act without their knowledge or own anything beyond what they permitted him to possess.

In theory, Mossi country belongs entirely to the Moro Naba, who may dispose of everything as he wishes and give land to anyone he pleases. In practice, the Moro Naba delegates some of his

4: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1957
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obligations to the Moro-naba, his lands were raided, his women seized and, if he were caught, he was killed.

It is difficult to ascertain how the institution of provincial administrators arose among the Mossi. Some of the people still believe that the ministers were formerly slaves of the Moro-naba, but Delobsom claims that the first ministers were warrior companions of Naba Oubri, the founder of the Ouagadougou dynasty.[4] These men were not members of the royal lineage and thus were inferior in status to the members of the royal lineage and sublineages under their supervision. However, as emissaries of the Moro-naba, these ministers were entitled to respect by all the people. The ministers recommended successors to vacant district chieftainships; thus it was incumbent upon a district chief to be friendly with his minister if he wished succession to go to his eldest son.

The minister was the person who carried orders from the Moro-naba to the district chiefs, and he reported back to the Moro-naba on conditions in the district he visited. However, the minister could not interfere in the internal affairs of a district, nor could the district chief complain to the Moro-naba about a minister. Everyone was required to observe the strict hierarchy; the only sanction that the district chief exercised over his minister was to appeal to another minister in the hope that the Moro-naba would come to his aid.

The districts that comprised the provinces of the ministers were scattered around the country and were not equal in size or importance. One minister, the Baloum-naba, controlled the districts ruled over by those chiefs who were the sons of recent rulers. Another, the Kamsoro-naba, a eunuch, had control of the largest and wealthiest districts, but he, in contrast to the other ministers, was not succeeded by sons and, when he died, the Moro-naba inherited all of his property. The ministers frequently became very wealthy because they received gifts whenever their charges went to Ouagadougou to pay homage to the ruler. The people from the districts under their control provided labor for their fields and for the upkeep of their houses. The ministers also received bribes from persons seeking vacant district chieftainships.

When a district chief or Kombéré died, his heirs sent a horse or a sheep with leaves on its tail to notify the ruler of the death. The Moro-naba always questioned the envoys, and when he was satisfied that his man had not met with foul play, he sent the animal to his chief minister. The Moro-naba then sent his own envoys to the late chief's house with offerings for sacrifices to their common ancestors, and also instructed the envoys to collect the death offerings from the chief's relatives. After the funeral the eldest son of the dead chief and the other pretenders went to Ouagadougou bearing gifts to the district minister and the other important men surrounding the ruler. When the time came to name the new district chief, the Moro-naba called his ministers together and asked them: "Which one of the candidates is really capable of succeeding the late chief?"

4: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1957
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635 The Ouidi-naba answered: "Naba, you may do as you desire." The ruler
631 then said, "Under these conditions I will designate the eldest son of the late chief as the new Kombéré because his father has never forgotten me, or gave me any trouble when he was alive. It will not be good to reject his son." The ministers then called the heir and put the following question to him three times: "Before his death, did your father designate anyone to replace him as chief?" The heir replied three times: "No! My father did not designate anyone. You may name anyone you wish; even if he is
[778] a blind man or a leper." The heir was then given a bonnet, the symbol of the *nam*, and made to swear on drinking the Tibo, a ritual potion, that if he ever betrayed the ruler, may the Tibo kill him. Thereafter, all the members of the new chief's lineage swore to respect and obey him.

635 The power and function of the Kombéré were similar to those of the
631 Moro-naba, but on a much reduced scale. As the person who had received the *nam* from the Moro-naba, he was supreme in his district, subject only
578 to his obligation to the head ruler. These obligations included the customary gifts and aid in warfare. There is some evidence that many of the Kombérés were lax in paying this tribute and rendering homage to the Moro-naba and consequently were punished or killed. Naba Warga fought a five-year-long civil war against a rebellious vassal before the rebel was killed, and Naba Wobogo was engaged in a three-year civil war with one of his vassals when the French arrived in the country. It is not clear whether the Moro-naba was able to prevent or stop war between his vassals over strayed cattle or stolen women. The Mossi in the district of Nobéré said that the Moro-naba did not often know when neighboring villages were at war. These wars did not involve the loss of territories by the districts, since it was ritually forbidden for one district chief to take lands from another.

631 The district chiefs had ministers who helped them administer the districts. These ministers were descendants of the sons of the Moro-naba's ministers who accompanied the first district chief when he took up his fief. They had control of several villages and they channeled goods and services from the villages to the district heads. The hierarchy of command was also strictly observed on this level, and a village chief who had disputes with other village chiefs, or who had important cases to be judged, was required always to be accompanied by his minister when he
[681 visited the district chief. This official could put any man into stocks for
565] serious crimes, but he could authorize the death only of commoners. It must be pointed out, however, that in many cases the district chief usurped the rights of the Moro-naba, and had a troublesome noble secretly strangled. The district chief, like the Moro-naba, could not be deposed; he was often forced to commit suicide or met death by foul play or in open civil war. The people in the district reacted to an unjust ruler by leaving his territories.

The village chiefs held their fiefs directly from the district chiefs, and

5: Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1959
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composed of two major groups of communities," Fortes goes on to describe this pattern succinctly:

> On the one side are those that claim to be descendants of immigrants from parts of the country other than their present habitats. On the other side are communities that claim to be the autochthonous inhabitants. . . . Many of the immigrant communities claim descent from forbears of the Mampuru ruling stock. Though now wholly amalgamated with the alleged aboriginal inhabitants, they have certain ritual observances and a system of chieftainship similar to those of the Mamprusi. . . . The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of "Custodian of the Earth." This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connection with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.[2]

The inhabitants of the Yatenga at the time of the arrival of the Mossi were the Kurumankobe, or Fulse, as they are called by the Mossi. Their descendants recognize their indigenous origin but have become almost wholly acculturated to the Mossi. While most Mossi bear the sib name Wedraogo and maintain political control in the Yatenga, the descendants of the Kurumankobe usually have the sib name Savadogo and are excluded from the exercise of political authority. They have retained the custodianship of the earth, and the elders of their lineages and sibs are the Mossi's *Tenga Soba namba*, their "earth custodians," charged with propitiating the supernatural forces of nature.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The present king of the Yatenga, the *Yatenga Naba*, is a lineal descendant of the first ruler, Naba Yadiga. The members of the lineage of the king are called "those who maintain themselves upon us" (*riim namba*). Directly subordinate to the authority of the Yatenga Naba are his four grand ministers, each of whom has authority over a particular province (*solum*) of the Yatenga.[3]

The province over which each of the grand ministers presides as lord is divided up into a number of cantons (*tense*), each of which is ruled by a chief who is the central political authority both of the village in which he resides and of the villages within the canton. Like the province, the concept of the canton is not precisely territorial. Some villages may owe

[2] Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 6.

[3] These provinces refer not only to geographical areas of the kingdom but to particular categories of the population. For example, the *Balum Naba* has direct authority over the southern regions of the Yatenga and indirect authority over the cantons of Risiam and Zittenga, political entities which have never fully recognized the central authority of the *Yatenga Naba*. This same minister is also especially charged with maintaining liaison with certain of the more important earth custodians throughout the Yatenga.

615 1. The Kamsoro Naba, chief of the eunuchs and prime minister, a sort of minister of the interior.

2. The Ouidi Naba, chief of the cavalry.

3. The Gounga Naba, chief of the infantry.

4. The Laralé Naba, guardian of the tombs of the Moro Nabas.

5. The Baloum Naba, major-domo and chief of the soroné (pages). He might be said to rule over the interior of the palace.

615 635 Those five ministers ruled over the five Mossi provinces that were administered directly: Kamsoro, Ouidi, Gounga, Laralé, and Baloum. As we can see, those provinces had no proper names, no names of their own, and each took the name of the dignitary who governed it. Thus, they were not true geographical or ethnic provinces, but artificial districts lifted out of an area that was both too extensively parceled out and too homogeneous to yield spontaneously anything but villages and cantons.

614 In addition to those five ministers, among which the Kamsoro Naba and Baloum Naba seem to have been the most important, there were other dignitaries and servitors, as follows: /569/

1. The Tamsaba or Kinsaba, high chief of the bodyguards.
2. The Samandé Naba, chief of the bodyguards.
3. The Pouy Naba, chief of the fetisheers.
4. The Gandé Naba, high priest and sacrificer.
5. The Dapouy Naba, chief of the servitors.
6. The Kambo Naba, subchief of the servitors.
7. The Bindé Naba, chief of the Moro Naba's drummers.
8. The Ouidianga Naba, chief of the grooms.
9. The Mendo Naba, chief or representative of the butchers.
10. The Dara Haba, chief of the markets.
11. The Kamboué Naba, executioner.
12. Finally, the Yarsé Naba, chief or representative of the Yarsé settled among the Mossi. The prestige he enjoyed actually ranked him immediately beneath the five ministers and the Tamsaba.

[554] "The various functions at the court of the Moro Naba," says Moulins, "are hereditary in the sense that their holders are always chosen by the sovereign among close relatives of the previous occupant in office.

643 669 of the electoral college was not accepted by the populace and disturbances occurred in spite of the proclamation of the king-elect. This was when Naba Sagha, the son of Naba Kom, was chosen. The people would have liked to see Kaoko, son of Naba Zombéré, nominated. Dissatisfied because the sovereign of their choice had not reached the throne, they would not acknowledge the man chosen by the college. The new monarch managed to take over the throne only after waging a bloody battle at the head of his followers against his unlucky rival.

645 635 The province chiefs who are ministers are nominated by the Moro Naba, who selects the man most deserving of the succession among the closest relatives of the chief to be replaced. Province chiefs enjoy considerable power in the administration of their provinces, they are surrounded with a large court, but they stand under the direct control of the Moro Naba.

635 It must be added that aside from the five provinces lying under the direct rule of the Moro Naba of Ouagadougou, there were four others (Boussouma and Béloussa to the northeast, Yako to the northwest, Tenkodogo to the southeast) that were mere vassal provinces and that actually enjoyed nearly complete autonomy prior to our occupation. Tenkodogo province was especially important.

The chiefs of these /latter/ provinces were true monarchs selected in the same fashion as the Moro Naba by the electoral college of their province. Once elected, they enjoyed all the prerogatives of sovereignty, nominating the canton chiefs and administering their provinces as they saw fit.

Their power was as absolute in their own sphere as that of the Moro Naba over the whole of his subject provinces, but they ac- [631] knowledged his sovereignty and offered him a gift as a token of their vassalage at the time when their powers were handed over to them.

634 624 /576/ Within the subject provinces, the canton chiefs were nominated by the Moro Naba on the basis of an introduction by the province chief. They were always selected among the closest relatives of the chief they were to replace, always descendants of Oubry, the first Moro Naba. They stood under the direct orders of the province chief, whom they had to use as an intermediary to communicate with the Moro Naba. It was their task to proceed with

634 the nomination of the village chiefs, who were always selected
621 from the family of the preceding chief.

Let us add that in principle, and all other things being equal,
1428 it was the eldest son of the deceased chief who was supposed to suc-
631 ceed his father, and this applied to village chiefs as well as to canton chiefs, province chiefs, and the Moro Naba. This principle ran counter to the true patriarchal principle where the younger brother is always the natural and legitimate heir of the deceased brother. The requirements of a warlike existence had probably forced it upon the Mossi at the time of their conquest of the Dagomba and Mossi territories.

This principle of direct inheritance (rather than collateral inheritance) had been restricted, however, by the powers of higher authorities represented by canton chiefs vis-à-vis village chiefs, province chiefs vis-à-vis canton chiefs, the Moro Naba vis-à-vis the province chiefs, and the electoral college of the high dignitaries vis-à-vis the future Moro Naba. In short, the warriors' principle of inheritance from father to eldest son ruled among the Mossi in the power sphere, but had to give way to the exigencies of government whenever necessary.

631 Let us not believe that the third principle, namely the consent of the people involved, was altogether unknown among the Mossi (the consent of the village inhabitants in the case of a village chief, of the canton notables in the case of a canton chief, of the province notables in the case of a province chief, etc.) This third principle, however, was the least important, the least taken into account, the least actualized from a mere potential. /577/ Whenever it clashed with the others, it had to give way.

635 Let us add that the majority of Mossi chiefs were aided by rep-
634 resentatives called baloum.
624 "The province chiefs," says the Monographie, "the majority of canton chiefs, and even the chiefs of a few important villages, are aided by one or several baloum or palace masters, whom they choose freely. These are sometimes former captives, but most frequently they are common natives or former soroné, and they are never nakomsé. Their function is not hereditary. It grants them the right to substitute for the naba, to speak and act in his name."

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

during a period of transition to effective independence.

The Mossi have the unique distinction of having preserved their ethnic identity and political autonomy throughout all the vicissitudes of Sudanese history until conquered by the French on September 1, 1896. The origin of Mossi society is couched in mythological terms. According to their tradition they came from Dagomba in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) sometime during the 11th or 12th century and moved northward towards the Niger River. During this migration they carved out three large kingdoms and many small principalities by conquering and absorbing some of the indigenous Ninisi and Foulse and Dogon populations, and by chasing the others into the cliffs of Bandiagara. In 1328, according to Es Sadi in the *Tarikh es Soudan*, the Mossi attacked, burned, and sacked Timbuktu, then held by Mali, and during the following century attacked Walata and Banku. They received their first setback by the Ali, and were severely beaten by Askia the Great, the usurper of the Songhoi throne, who lead a *jihad* against them in 1469. But their attacks into the Niger bend did not cease until the Moroccans became masters of Timbuktu sometime in the early 1590's. From that period until the French conquest, the Mossi remained relatively quiescent. They developed and maintained an economy based on grain cultivation, livestock rearing, cotton production, and trade between the forest zones and the desert. Their political system crystallized into a loose confederacy of fairly autonomous kingdoms and principalities, sometimes tribute to the Moro Naba, the ruler of Wagadougou.

Wagadougou, the most important Mossi political entity, was like the lesser kingdoms, pyramidal in political structure. At the top was and still is the Moro Naba, a lineal descendant of Wedraogo, the Dagomba conquerer who founded the Mossi group and Moro Naba Wubri, the first ruler of the Wagadougou dynasty. Paying allegiance to him, were the princes who ruled such autonomous provinces as Yako, Boulsa, Mane, Riziam, and Boussouma. These princes were all sons or near relatives of the early Moro Nabas. Directly under the Moro Naba were district chiefs who were descended from the cadet branches of the ruling family. The villages within the district were in turn ruled by the chiefs of the indigenous populations. In many of the villages,

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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613 173 778 had done so with full permission of his father and in place of an unadventurous elder brother.

635 642 613 173 778 For example, the ruling family of the Boulsa province claimed that its ancestor, Naba Namende, was the eldest son of Mogho Naba Oubri and chose to become his father's *Kourita* (a young son of a deceased Mogho Naba chosen as his father's personal representative on earth) and go into exile rather than subject his younger brother to the ordeal. At the same time, Namende sought to retain royal power equal to that of his brother, the new Mogho Naba, by taking Oubri's royal amulets with him.[3]

635 642 613 631 Mane province, too, was founded by one Nyaseme, a son of Koudoumie, who felt that he should have been given the nam. When routed in battle by his elder brother Kouda, he moved into the region of Mane, where he defeated the indigenous Ninisi and ruled over them. The princes who broke away from Ouagadougou during Koudoumie's reign considered themselves theoretically equal to the supreme ruler. Thus, they took the title of Dim. By so doing, they dramatized their claim to equality of status, if not of power, with the Mogho Naba, and their determination to "submit only to God."[4]

642 643 613 631 593 The Mossi insist that the relationship between the Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba was similar to that between father and sons, since the Dimdamba were "really the sons of the Mogho Naba" and are said to have acted as such. This analogy is interesting in view of the Mossi traditional pattern of avoidance—combined with love and tolerance—between fathers and elder sons.[5] The Dimdamba were often allowed to act at variance with the Mogho Naba. Some of them shifted allegiance from kingdom to kingdom; others usurped the power of the Mogho Naba over smaller districts, or claimed that they had been given this power; and most of them regulated their own affairs with little interference from their sovereign. He, as "father," interfered on occasion in their internal affairs, demanding help from them and often chastising them if they failed to comply.

634 631 613 642 The Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba often appointed their younger sons or brothers as rulers (Kombemba) of the districts that made up their kingdoms and principalities. In this way, power and authority were kept within the royal clan and its lineages. Nevertheless, in keeping with the concept of corporate access to the nam, the rulers of these dependencies had traditions that served to reconcile their claims to kingly or princely status with their actual subordinate position. District founders, too, were often portrayed as eldest sons who had been cheated out of their patrimony or had voluntarily left it to establish new districts. In some cases, the legendary heroes were granted miraculous births as well.

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631 ture, offers what is probably the best analysis of power relations among the
623 important Mossi chiefs. In commenting upon the Mogho Naba's inability
174 to stop the war between Yako and Yatenga he asks, "How could it be
114 otherwise? With what sanctions could this king without an army back up his orders if he ventured to give any? . . . In short, when the Ouagadougou ruler speaks, he is sometimes obeyed. If he is, all is well; if he is not, all is still well. Everything remains as before."[18] Crozat was mistaken if he believed that the Mogho Naba did not have a fighting force. What he did not have was a standing army to exercise his power whenever he wished. When he was able to summon an army, he was effective; when he was not, he had little power over any territory but his own. Crozat, like Binger, gives a strange picture of the political relationship between the Mogho Naba and the other rulers. He tells us that in the Mossi political hierarchy, "after the ruler of Ouagadougou comes the ruler of Boussouma, then the Yatenga ruler, and then the ruler of Yako."[19] Yatenga was traditionally independent of Ouagadougou, whereas Boussouma and Yako were simply autonomous principalities dependent on the Mogho Naba. It is possible that Crozat mistook the relative power of these various political entities for a hierarchical relationship. It is also possible that at the time of his visit, the Dimdamba felt sufficiently powerful to ignore the traditional hierarchy as far as their political relationship with other rulers was concerned, and were simply acknowledging relative gradations of power.

643 Clearly, the sovereignty of the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou over the
642 independent kingdoms and autonomous principalities depended chiefly on
628 military might. The stronger a Mogho Naba was, the more actively he tried to control the internal administration of the autonomous principalities and to exercise police powers over them or on their behalf. However, most Mogho Nanamse were content to claim superiority or control over the independent kingdoms and refrained from meddling in their affairs.

643 Within the Mogho Naba's own kingdom, however, the situation was
635 different. Here, like other important Mossi rulers, he directed the admin-
634 istrative apparatus. For administrative purposes, the kingdom of Ouaga-
[642 dougou was divided into five large provinces (*weto*; sing. *weogho*; or
[161 *solem*, from *so*, "command"). Together they included some three hundred districts, in which there were over four thousand villages inhabited by some 860,000 persons.[20] (Not included here were districts and villages directly administered by the Mogho Naba.) The provinces were not compact physical entities, because their component units were scattered throughout the country. To be sure, some of the districts within a province were close together or even contiguous, but many others stood alongside districts be-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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longing to other provinces. Provinces also differed with respect to the number of districts they included and the nature and size of these districts. Some provinces were larger than others; some were wealthier; and some were more difficult to administer.

Each province was administered by a governor, who also functioned as an important minister at the court of Ouagadougou. In the order of their importance, these governors were the Ouidi Naba, the Larhalle Naba, the Gounga Naba, the Baloum Naba, and the Kamsaogho Naba. Smaller administrative units (both districts and villages) were under the direct control of the Mogho Naba himself, or under the supervision of his relatives or lesser officials. None of the governors were nobles or descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri, but their positions were hereditary. According to one tradition, the first provincial administrators were personal slaves of the early Mossi rulers who were given the task of supervising the activities of district chiefs of noble status. Another, more romantic tradition is that the man who became the first governor or Gounga Naba was a companion of Mogho Naba Oubri during the conquest of Ouagadougou. Later, the Gounga Naba presented one of his friends to Oubri with the request that the man take precedence over him, be made chief governor, and be given the title of Ouidi Naba. Oubri allegedly acceded to this request, and later granted another request of the Gounga Naba that a friend of the Ouidi Naba be named Larhalle Naba and be made the second governor. The Gounga Naba told the Mogho Naba that he preferred to see his friends happy and that he was content to be third minister. This tradition does not state when or how the Baloum Naba and the Kamsaogho Naba were named governors.[1]

With the exception of the Kamsaogho Naba, who was a eunuch and had no heirs, the provincial governors headed administrative lineages. These lineages provided administrators not only for Ouagadougou but also for the principalities and districts. Cheron states that the Ouidi Naba of Boulsa was "a descendant of the Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou, a great dignitary who rules a province and sits among the electors of the Mogho Naba."[2] Many administrative lineages on the district level were descended from officials sent down by the Mogho Naba with a new district chief in lieu of one deposed. When a chief was deposed, his administrators, like his relatives, lost their importance and their ties to Ouagadougou.

The Ouidi Naba, called *Mosi' ba* ("father of the Mossi") and *Sida soba* ("master of the truth"), was the principal administrator and the prime minister. His titles undoubtedly sprang from his important role in the election of the Mogho Naba and from his position as caretaker of the king-

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dom during the interregnum.[33] The latter task was especially suited to a prime minister, since the Mossi regarded the interregnum as the most difficult period in their political life. The Ouidi Naba's administrative tasks were considered so important that he never went to war and was theoretically immune from punishment or execution by the Mogho Naba. This immunity was necessary, because the Mogho Naba had the right to execute anyone who brought him unwelcome news, and often did so. Since the Ouidi Naba announced good news as well as bad, it would have been folly to subject him to this rule. Some reports in the French colonial archives state that the Mogho Naba was expected to follow the Ouidi Naba's advice at all times, and could not veto any of his actions. These reports add, moreover, that if a Ouidi Naba considered a Mogho Naba dangerous for the welfare of the country, he could rightfully compel the ruler to kill himself. According to Lambert, one Ouidi Naba known as Baba forced Mogho Naba Karfo (ca. 1800) to commit suicide. It appears that aside from waging a long and unpopular war against Naba Djighima of Lalle, this Mogho Naba had seized the riches of his wealthy subjects for distribution among the poor. Moreover, he allegedly dispensed justice without making much distinction between nobles and commoners, which so displeased the nobles that they encouraged the Ouidi Naba to put Karfo to death. Baba sent the sovereign a poisoned arrow and a message consisting of a single word: *ki* (die). Karfo allegedly committed suicide that very night.[34]

Thus, it appears that under certain conditions the prime minister could impeach his "all-powerful" sovereign. We cannot assume, however, that all prime ministers were sufficiently powerful to control the Mogho Naba. Many Mogho Nanamse limited their Ouidi Naba to merely giving advice on affairs of state and insisted that he concern himself solely with his own province.

The provinces administered by the five ministers were made up of smaller entities or districts. The districts in the provinces of the Ouidi Naba, the Larhalle Naba, and the Gounga Naba were ruled by the sons and other descendants of ancient Mogho Nanamse. The province controlled by the Kamsaogho Naba was more important. His districts were the wealthiest and among the most populous in the nation, and they brought the largest revenues to the Mogho Naba. The reason for this, of course, was that the Kamsaogho Naba was a eunuch and had no heirs; when he died, all his riches reverted to the Mogho Naba. The province controlled by the Baloum Naba was the most difficult to administer. Its districts were ruled by the sons of recent Mogho Nanamse who felt that as holders of the nam they were free to appropriate the goods of the population. The Baloum

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Naba was responsible for checking these depredations, but he had little coercive force since these nobles were infinitely superior to him in rank.

The Mogho Naba held his five ministers responsible for the administration of the districts within their provinces. Therefore they had to function as liaison officers between him and the district chiefs. Every morning, in order of precedence, the ministers reported the news they had received from their provinces since the previous day. At this time, the Mogho Naba also gave them messages for their districts. Later in the day, the ministers presented to the ruler those persons who had come from their provinces to the capital with special grievances, requests, or gifts. Delicate affairs of state were left for the evening, when they were discussed by the Mogho Naba, his minister or ministers, and other important persons.

From all reports, these administrative affairs kept both the ministers and the Mogho Naba quite busy. Binger, who could barely conceal his displeasure with Mogho Naba Sanum, gives this critical but otherwise highly illuminating view of the Mossi ruler's administrative activities:

> The duties of Naba Sanum are not too important. They consist of receiving visits throughout the day. In the morning, at about six o'clock, the drums announce that the ruler has arisen. When he has washed and refreshed himself with a meal, his captives and his wives go to his chamber to salute him. Then comes the turn of strangers, people of the neighborhood, petitioners, and others. They squat before the reception area until the ruler deigns to appear. When a large number of people have gathered, one of the [pages] goes to notify the ruler, who then arrives, sits on his cushion, and casts an amiable glance on the gathering while all present snap their fingers. As soon as Naba Sanum is seated, the petitioners and visitors hurry toward the monarch, throw themselves face down on the earth, and cover their heads with sand. Then each of them gets up and presents a gift of greater or lesser importance, in cowries or foodstuffs, according to what he wishes to ask. Then the [pages] come and say to the ruler, "A certain man has brought a sack of cowries, or a goat, or an ox. He desires to speak to you." The ruler thanks all of them with a *nif kende* (thanks) and retires into his chamber. It is well known that not one out of fifty petitioners was given the opportunity to have his wishes heard. Those who were heard had first spoken to an attendant who, after being paid in advance, had put off their case indefinitely by stating that it would be dealt with next. . . . Since the monarch's days are so well filled, one easily understands why he finds it difficult to deal effectively with the internal and external affairs of his kingdom; in any case, Mossi country is in a period of decadence that will only be aggravated with time.[28]

The activities Binger considered frivolous were, on the contrary, important for the proper administration of the kingdom. The Mogho Naba had to receive petitions from the districts and transmit administrative orders to

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643 his people. We shall see that these orders ran the gamut from demands for soldiers, tribute, and labor, to requests for sacrifices to the ancestors or to local deities for the welfare of the country.

635 The provincial governors seldom visited the districts under their control
645 more than once or twice a year. They transmitted official orders to the dis-
[203] tricts through retainers. Some ministers such as the Gounga Naba kept the
[634] sons and servants of district chiefs in the capital to be used as messengers. The district chiefs, in turn, used their sons or servants to transmit messages to their provincial governors or through them to the Mogho Naba. The use of intermediaries in the administration served another purpose: it prevented face-to-face contact, with all its potential for personal animosities, from impairing relations between those whose status depended on their political office and those whose status was derived from membership in the royal lineage.

635 Relations between the provincial ministers and the district chiefs were
645 often charged with hostility and suspicion. The district chiefs regarded the
634 provincial ministers as representatives of the Mogho Naba, and thus as
578 persons to be obeyed. Simultaneously, however, they resented this control by social inferiors. They felt that since they were the descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri, they should receive orders only from the Mogho Naba himself. Thus, while the district chiefs accepted orders from their provincial governors, they never permitted them to forget their social status or to interfere with the internal affairs of the districts. They felt that this was the prerogative of the royal lineage. Most provincial ministers accepted these restrictions on their activities, but nevertheless saw to it that the district chiefs surrendered the goods collected for the Mogho Naba and governed their people well. Sometime in the 1920's, a provincial administrator went to a district and insulted its chief for failing to deliver the quota of millet set by the French colonial government. The accusation of laziness and embezzlement so infuriated the district chief that he asked the provincial minister whether he had taken leave of his senses and forgotten to whom he was speaking. The person who reported this incident said that if the district chief had not been restrained, he would have killed the administrator on the spot.

Both provincial administrators and district chiefs could impose indirect sanctions on each other if the bounds of propriety were overstepped in either direction. A district chief harried by his minister could not complain directly to the Mogho Naba. But he could, and often did, show his dissatisfaction by lodging with another provincial minister when he went to the capital. He would then ask the official to accompany him when he went

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to render homage to the monarch. This attracted the attention of the Mogho Naba, who investigated the grievance of the district chief. If the provincial minister were found to be in serious error, he might be deposed and executed. The Ouidi Naba was theoretically exempt from such punishment, but it is doubtful that a strong monarch would have allowed even this official to cause trouble.

A provincial governor dissatisfied with a district chief under his charge could, under certain conditions, have him deposed and put to death. He achieved this by complaining to the monarch that the chief was either withholding tribute or misgoverning his people. In most cases, however, the minister could curb the district chief by hinting that his son would not receive a recommendation as successor to the nam of the district. This was usually enough to win the cooperation of the most recalcitrant chief, if only because his future status as the honored ancestor of a ruling local line would be jeopardized if he rebelled. These sanctions were thus sufficient to ensure satisfactory relations between the provincial ministers and their district chiefs, at least on the surface. This was to the advantage of both groups, since in the final analysis the failure of either to administer or rule well might result in the death penalty.

Many districts and villages in Ouagadougou were administered not by the provincial ministers but by officials directly responsible to the Mogho Naba. The districts in question were often ruled by close relatives of the Mogho Naba or by persons who had gained his good graces. The villages were often inhabited by slaves and governed by headmen who were themselves slaves. Like the other territories of the Mogho Naba, these districts and villages were not physically contiguous. The districts were mixed in with districts administered by the provincial ministers, and the villages stood within the territorial boundaries of district chiefs. Whenever the Mogho Naba wanted to communicate with a chief of such a village or district, he sent one of his retainers. The chiefs, in turn, used their own people to send messages and goods to Ouagadougou. The general administration of these districts and villages differed little from that of the territories administered by the provincial ministers. The main difference was that the Mogho Naba took a greater interest in their everyday affairs. This called for greater efficiency on the part of local officials; for they, like the other chiefs, faced the penalty of deposition and death for maladministration.

Of all Mossi officials, the district chiefs had the most difficult administrative task. They were in direct contact with the people, and thus ran a greater risk of being charged with misgovernment. Countless district chiefs were deposed and executed because they had allegedly disobeyed or rebelled

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The district chief was relatively secure in the control of his territory as long as he maintained amicable relations with his immediate superiors and administered his district to their satisfaction. A less important but more constant source of concern was his relationship with neighboring chiefs. Many people who can remember the pre-conquest period say it was unsafe for a man to trespass into another district unless he was on an official mission from his chief to another chief. It appears that most of the fighting occurred over strayed cattle and stolen women, with constant raids and counter-raids. The cattle were eaten, and the women kept as wives. Captured men were sometimes sold as slaves, but more often were held for ransom. They were not kept as slaves, since the Mossi were forbidden to enslave other Mossi. Needless to say, this fighting was frowned upon by the Mogho Naba. Since all district chiefs believed in their common descent from Ouedraogo and Oubri and paid allegiance to the Mogho Naba, any fighting among them was not only a sin against the ancestors but also an act of disloyalty to the Mogho Naba. When (as was usually the case) this fighting was of short duration and few people were killed, the Mogho Naba took no official notice of it. But when it became serious, he sent the provincial administrator to stop the fighting and to summon the dissident elements to the capital for trial. The speed and severity with which the Mogho Naba dealt with quarrels within his own realm usually depended upon his strength. At some periods in Mossi history there was little internal disorder, because the rulers were strong; at other periods, under weak rulers, disorder practically amounted to internal chaos. During such periods, the Mossi were kept together only by the bonds of kinship and religion which united them against outsiders.

The district chief maintained tight control over his own territory and took an active part in its administration. In a district like Nobere, for example, the chief was aided both by an informal council and by an administrative apparatus similar to but smaller than the one at Ouagadougou. The council included men with whom the chief had grown up, members of his immediate family such as his brothers, and a few formal administrative personnel. These councillors visited him every day, brought him occasional gifts, received gifts from him in turn, and discussed informally all matters of interest. Yet, informal as this communication was, it enabled the district chief to know what was going on in his villages. Moreover, these councillors interceded for various villages and gave the chief valuable advice in administrative matters.

The formal administrative personnel of the district included a Ouidi Naba, a Baloum Naba, a Tansoba, and lesser officials with titles identical

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chiefs did not regain any of their traditional power. They remained auxiliaries of the administration. Taking Mogho Naba Kom as an example, one report states that this "simple, intelligent, compliant man served as news agent and made himself useful to the political administration" until the arrival of Hesling, when he took a livelier interest in the affairs of the colony.[84] Another source says of the same monarch:

> Free of the ancestral traditions that forbade him to leave his palace, and curious about progress and administration, he travels on all the roads and, under our supervision, busies himself with the settlement of administrative problems, to which he lends the weight of his authority. He makes the proposals for the nomination of province and district chiefs; he encourages his subjects to work and produce. Finally, he fulfills with the greatest dignity the representative functions that devolve upon him at his palace and in the official ceremonies.[85]

While it is true that the Mogho Naba made proposals for the nomination of chiefs, he was powerless to prevent their dismissal if they incurred the displeasure of the administration—a frequent occurrence during the Hesling period. For example, when the administration deposed Naba Boulga of Doulougou district for "incompetence" and placed him in "enforced residence" in a neighboring district, the French officials encouraged the election of Bila Kongo primarily because he was a former cercle guard. Bila Kongo was assassinated in 1924, and the Mogho Naba named Mahama Ouedraogo to take his place. This new chief soon had difficulties with the administration, however, and was deposed for exacting unauthorized taxes from his subjects and for abusing his authority. Mogho Naba Kom then appointed Ousmane Ouedraogo, but he was deposed for "incompetence" and exiled to Sao district.

On the other hand, Hesling made few attempts to change the traditional political and administrative structures of the Mossi. One contemporary source says:

> Since its inception the Government of the Upper Volta has made no changes or innovations, or at best very few, in this connection. The native administrative entities in the cercles of Ouagadougou, Ouahigouya, Kaya, and Fada-N'Gourma have remained the same as those which Haut-Sénégal et Niger transferred to the colony in 1919. . . . Only in 1922 did the cercle of Koudougou have its "Gurunsi" districts separated from its "Mossi" districts to form a new province, which was placed under the command of the Léo Naba, a chief of the same Gurunsi race. Tenkodogo, a cercle made up of a large number of small districts ruled by thoroughly inept chiefs, has been the object of a partial internal reorganization since the beginning of 1923. The number of its native *circonscriptions* [districts] has been reduced from 82 to 73.[86]